

Cultural Memory and Survival

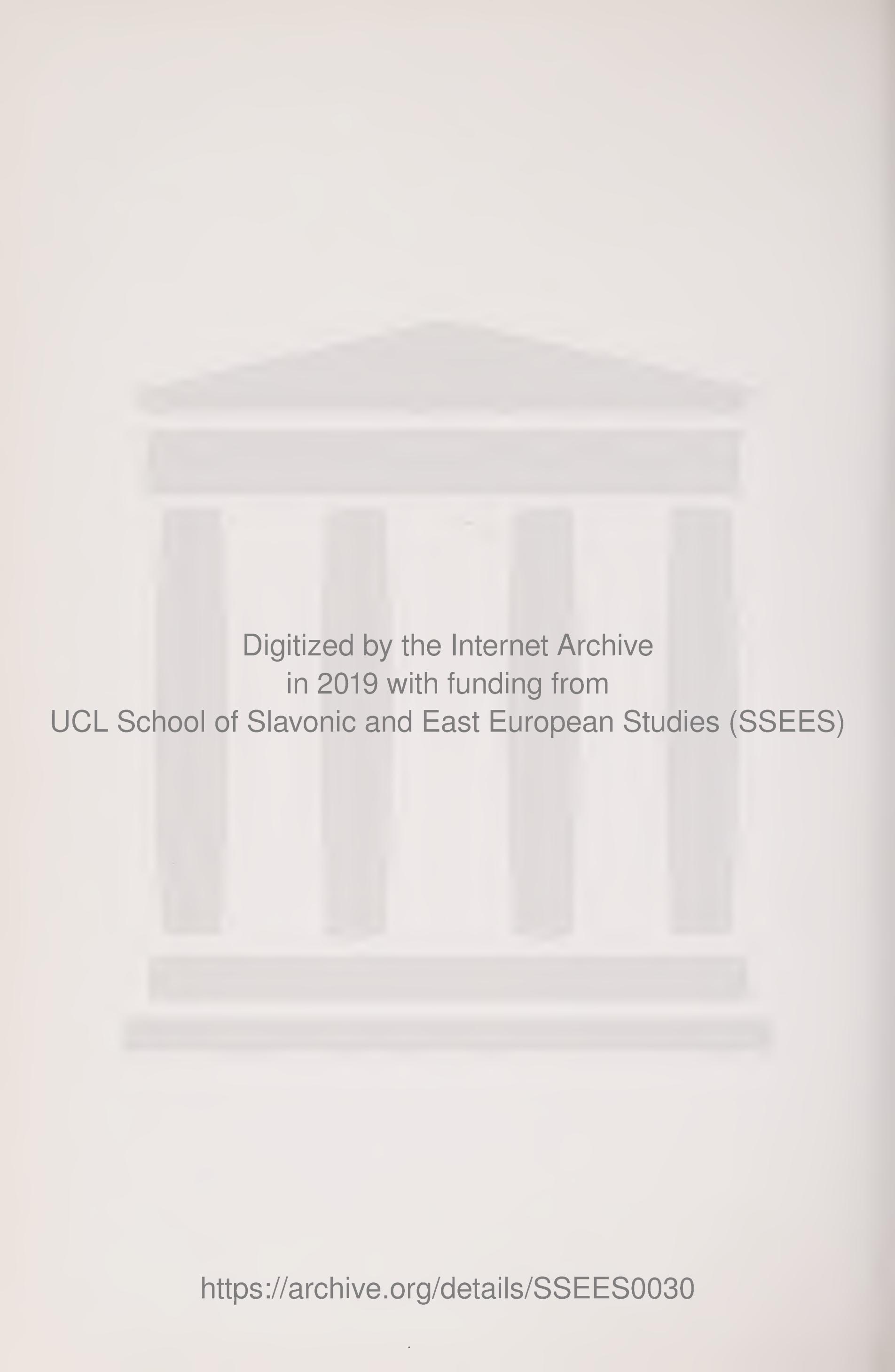
The Russian Renaissance of Classical Antiquity
in the Twentieth Century

Pamela Davidson



UCL



A faint, light gray watermark of a classical building with four columns and a triangular pediment is visible in the background.

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CULTURAL MEMORY AND SURVIVAL: THE RUSSIAN RENAISSANCE OF
CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY IN THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY

PAMELA DAVIDSON

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CULTURAL MEMORY AND SURVIVAL:
The Russian Renaissance of Classical Antiquity
in the Twentieth Century

Inaugural Lecture
delivered by

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on 21 May 2009

Cultural Memory and Survival: The Russian Renaissance of Classical Antiquity in the Twentieth Century

‘You are all young in mind, [...] you have no belief rooted in old tradition and no knowledge hoary with age. And the reason is this. There have been and will be many different calamities to destroy mankind, the greatest of them by fire and water, lesser ones by countless other means.’ (Plato, the *Timaeus*)

This lecture is dedicated to the memory of two outstanding Russian scholars and remarkable individuals, whose contribution to our understanding of classical antiquity and Russian literature has been immense: Sergei Averintsev (1937–2004) and Mikhail Gasparov (1935–2005). When they died just a few years ago, their loss seemed to mark the end of an era, and is still felt acutely. The key role that they played in keeping the memory of classical antiquity alive in Soviet times and in bridging the gap between the legacy of the pre-revolutionary era and the present age is central to our subject.

Now that we are inching our way, year by year, into the twenty-first century, it becomes easier, perhaps, to look back over the past century and to take stock of certain trends. Against the background of all the historical upheavals, one paradox stands out: the vulnerability of culture and yet the miracle of its survival. In Russia the situation has been particularly acute: not only two world wars shared with the rest of Europe, but also the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the Great Terror and purges of the 1930s, the deliberate erosion of national cultural memory during the Soviet period, and the challenge of recovering or re-inventing the past which post-Soviet Russia now faces. In this context it seems appropriate to look at the role played by classical antiquity in Russia from the turn of the last century through to the present. If classical antiquity is the common cradle of Western European and Russian art, it stands to reason that attitudes towards its legacy can serve as a litmus test of how Russian culture perceives its origins, development, and future direction.

My survey falls into three parts. In the first, I will look back and examine what classical antiquity meant for Russians in the period leading up to the revolution known as the Silver Age; in the second part, I will consider what happened to the legacy of this interest in Soviet times; and finally, in the third part, I will make some comments about the present situation. The topic is a vast one, and I make no attempt at comprehensive coverage; my intention is simply to identify some broad patterns, illustrated by a few examples. Although the twentieth century has been a period of striking discontinuities in Russia, I hope to demonstrate that the reception of classical antiquity has been marked by, and is even the source of some surprising continuities.

Classical antiquity in the Silver Age

By starting at the turn of the last century I do not, of course, mean to imply that there was no significant interest in classical antiquity before – on the contrary, such an interest flourished in Russia from the eighteenth century onwards.¹ But what happened at the beginning of the twentieth century was quite different in its intensity. Hardly a sphere was left untouched by the revival of classical antiquity: it could be found all over the place: in poetry, novels, plays, philosophical works, and translations from the classics; in scholarly articles and public lectures; in painting and book illustration; in architecture, music, drama, and ballet; in museums, journals, and the publishing world – the list could easily be extended. And we should not imagine that this was just a matter of a few lone, bookish individuals, wishing to bury themselves in a distant past. The revival of classical antiquity became a vibrant part of modern life, absorbed through the very architecture of the cities and permeating right into the style of people's homes – where else but in St Petersburg, for example, could one find ladies running around in togas, hosting salons modelled on Plato's *symposia*, or husbands and wives introducing a third person into their marriage to emulate the Greek cult of Eros? Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), the classical scholar and Symbolist poet of Dionysus, and his wife, the writer Lidiia Zinov'eva-Annibal (1866–1907), were prominent representatives of this trend. Ivanov cultivated the image of his beloved spouse as a Maenad and Muse, and she dressed to fit the part in flowing robes and sandals.

The Silver Age revival of interest in classical antiquity was so intense and all pervasive that it has often been compared to the Italian renaissance – both at the time and subsequently. There are indeed grounds for this comparison, since both periods were marked by the rediscovery of the legacy of classical antiquity and its creative assimilation into contemporary culture. The most useful aspect of this analogy, however, is the way it reveals certain important differences. The first is very obvious: the fact that the Russian renaissance of classical antiquity happened several centuries after the Italian renaissance meant that classical antiquity was 'rediscovered' in Russia through the prism of much later cultural epochs, including the Italian renaissance, the Enlightenment, German romanticism, and the philosophy of Nietzsche. All of this was taken on board simultaneously: instead of being treated to an extended banquet involving several different courses with plenty of room in between to aid the digestive process, Russians were invited to sample a traditional table of *zakuski* [hors-d'oeuvres] where everything was on offer simultaneously.

This led to some interesting results. For example, between 1896 and 1905, the poet, novelist, critic, and translator from Greek, Dimitrii Merezhkovskii (1865–1945) produced an ambitious trilogy, designed to investigate the clash between paganism and Christianity at three different epochs. The titles of the novels speak for themselves: *Death of the Gods, Julian the Apostate* (1896), *Resurrection of the Gods, Leonardo da Vinci* (1901), and *Anti-Christ, Peter and Aleksei* (1905). Merezhkovskii's attempt to establish a framework for the understanding of contemporary Russia through the three-layered prism of late Roman antiquity, the Italian renaissance, and eighteenth-century Russian history is typical of the syncretic approach of his age.

The relative lateness of Russia's classical revival led to a second major difference. Whereas in the West Christianity had to establish itself upon the foundations of classical

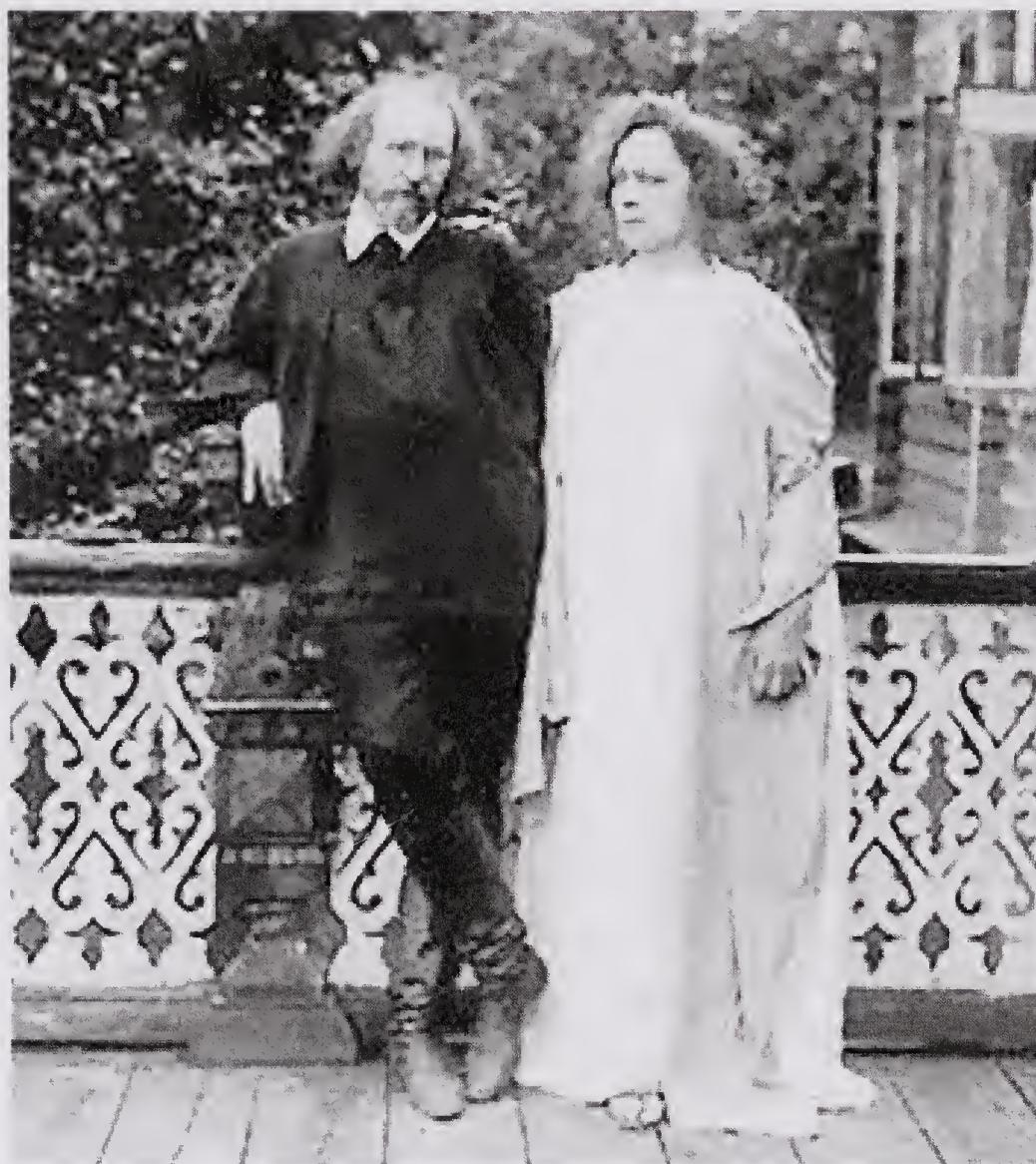


Figure 1 Viacheslav Ivanov, Lidiia Zinov'eva-Annibal (1907)

pagan antiquity, in Russia exactly the opposite situation prevailed. When Vladimir decided that the Rus' should adopt the religion of the Greek Orthodox in the late tenth century, this marked the beginning of Russian literacy. Christianity, received from Byzantium, came first; the reception of classical antiquity came several centuries later and was superimposed on a pre-existent religious tradition. In the middle of the nineteenth century the Slavophile thinker Ivan Kireevskii (1806–1856) used this very point to argue for the supremacy of Russian Orthodoxy over Catholicism; in his view Russia's late start had providentially enabled it to avoid the 'limited and one-sided cultural pattern' of Europe:

Having accepted the Christian religion from Greece, Russia was in constant contact with the Universal Church. The civilisation of the pagan world reached it through the Christian religion, without driving it to single-minded infatuation, as the living legacy of one particular nation might have done. It was only later, after it had become firmly grounded in a Christian civilisation, that Russia began to assimilate the last fruits of the learning and culture of the ancient world.²

It follows from this that the prism through which classical antiquity was viewed in Russia tended to be a religious one – initially because of the role of Byzantium as a mediator between its choice of religious identity and the classical past, and subsequently because of the growth of the Russian national idea during the nineteenth century. This difference goes a long way towards explaining why there have been so many attempts in

Russia to uncover the religious significance of Greek and Roman antiquity and to apply this understanding to a vision of Russia's mission in the world. Ivanov's extensive work on the religion of Dionysus as a precursor of Christianity and source of renewal for Russia, or the view of Moscow as the Third Rome are well-known examples.³

At the turn of the last century, this trend culminated in the notion of the so-called 'third Slavonic renaissance' – 'third' because it was supposed to follow the first two revivals that had taken place during the Italian renaissance and in eighteenth-century Germany. Faddei Zelinsky (1859–1944), a prominent classicist of Polish origin who taught at St Petersburg University, was a particularly energetic proponent of this ideal. Already in 1899 he advocated the ideal of a 'fusion between the Greek and the Slavonic spirit', based on Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*.⁴ In the early 1900s, when he first came across the poetry and scholarly work of Viacheslav Ivanov, he attributed 'prophetic' significance to his earlier words and welcomed the poet's work as the fulfilment of his ideal, hailing him excitedly as 'one of the heralds of this renaissance'.⁵ In 1909, when Innokentii Annenskii (1856–1909), the poet, teacher and translator of the classics, unexpectedly died, Zelinskii wrote an obituary for *Apollo* [*Apollon*], lauding the poet as one of the key figures whose translations of Euripides would serve to bring about this imminent revival. Apparently the two friends often used to discuss the 'dawning "Slavonic renaissance"' during boring committee meetings. Zelinskii recognized that it was not within their power to predict the exact moment when the new era would begin, their job was simply 'to work and work'.⁶

This 'work' took many forms. For the purposes of this lecture, to illustrate the Silver Age's obsession with classical antiquity, I will concentrate on one particular painting, the monumental canvas by Lev Bakst (1866–1924) entitled 'Terror antiquus' [Ancient terror], completed in 1908 and now housed in the State Russian Museum of St Petersburg. Apart from the intrinsic interest of this work, the story of its genesis and reception is highly instructive as it reveals a typical cycle that informs and drives the process of classical revival. The first stage involves the artist's immersion in a fertile climate of ideas linked to the classical revival; this leads into the second stage, the need to experience these ideas in real life, followed by the third stage of artistic expression, which in turn gives rise to the fourth stage, a variety of critical responses, generating further works of art in other fields.

Let us start with the first stage of this cycle: the artist's immersion in a classical ambience. As a resident of St Petersburg, Bakst was exposed to the capital's obsession with classical antiquity, evident in its neo-classical architecture, in the collections of the Hermitage, and in many aspects of its cultural life. Bakst was steeped in this atmosphere, and tried to bring it to life in the theatre. In 1902 and 1904 he designed the set and costumes for productions of Euripides' *Hippolytus* (1902) and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* (1904), performed in new translations by Merezhkovskii. As a contemporary reviewer noted, Bakst had previously spent many hours in the Hermitage, copying classical designs from tombstones and vases as inspiration for his designs; his highly original set and costumes were widely considered to be the most successful part of the production.⁷ From dusty museum artefacts to live performances on stage, Bakst had taken his first step in bringing classical antiquity to life in modern-day Russia.

This was not enough, however. Bakst was desperate to get to Greece and experience antiquity at first hand. In March 1903 he wrote to his future wife (the daughter of the art collector Pavel Tret'iakov) about his longing to travel to Greece to make sketches for his productions: 'What about Greece? I think of it with hope. I so love the ancient world. I'm waiting for personal revelations there... Ah, the Acropolis! I need it, because I have given too much space to my imagination and too little for reality'.⁸

These words convey Bakst's craving to move beyond the initial stage of 'imagining' Greece to the second stage of grounding his mental picture in 'reality'. His first attempt to get to Greece in 1903 was unfortunately foiled by a bout of ill health. In May 1907, however, he finally managed to go on a one-month trip to Greece with his friend the artist Valentin Serov (1865–1911). According to his earliest biographer, this journey was 'one of the outstanding events of his intellectual life'.⁹ After sailing from Odessa to Constantinople, the two companions continued on to Athens. When they visited the Acropolis they were quite overwhelmed by its divine grandeur; as Bakst later recalled, Serov announced that he wanted 'to cry and pray' at the same time.¹⁰

The artists travelled on to Crete, Thebes, Mycenae, Delphi and Olympia. On Crete they were thrilled to see the remains of the palace of Minos at Knossos, under excavation by the English archaeologist, Arthur Evans (1851–1941). In the museum next to the site of the temple of Zeus in Olympia an interesting incident took place, revealing Bakst's longing for a 'hands on' communion with ancient Greek art. After an hour of craning his neck upwards to study the pediment, he was gripped by an uncontrollable urge to touch the marble shoulders and bosom of the sculpted figure of Niobe – he got a stool and had just climbed up onto the platform in front of the pediment when the dozy attendant woke up and began to berate him in a mixture of French and Greek. Bakst whipped out a hankie and started to dust down the face of one of Niobe's weeping children, while Serov placated the attendant, evidently with money.¹¹

It is a testimony to the lasting impact of this trip that Bakst not only kept detailed notes at the time, but also decided to write up his impressions and publish them some fifteen years later, while living in Paris as an émigré. In a charmingly eccentric booklet entitled *Serov and I in Greece: Travel Notes* (1923), he commented that his experience of Greece on this trip was so new and unexpected that he was forced to re-examine and reorder all his earlier 'Petersburg notions about heroic Hellas'.¹² In other words, the direct contact with Greece in real life acted as a catalyst, transforming the theoretical knowledge acquired in the artificial city of Petersburg into a new vision, based on direct, unmediated personal experience. As his friend the artist and critic Alexandre Benois (1870–1960) later noted:

[...] Bakst has been completely taken over by Hellas. One has to hear the infectious thrill with which he speaks of Greece, especially of Evans's latest discoveries in Crete, one has to see him in the antiquities departments of the Hermitage or Louvre, methodically copying the ornament, the details of the costumes and setting, to realise that this is more than a superficial historical enthusiasm.

Bakst is 'possessed' by Hellas, he is delirious about it, he thinks of nothing else.¹³

We now move on to the third stage of the process, when the combination of classical atmosphere and personal experience is translated into art. During his trip Bakst was

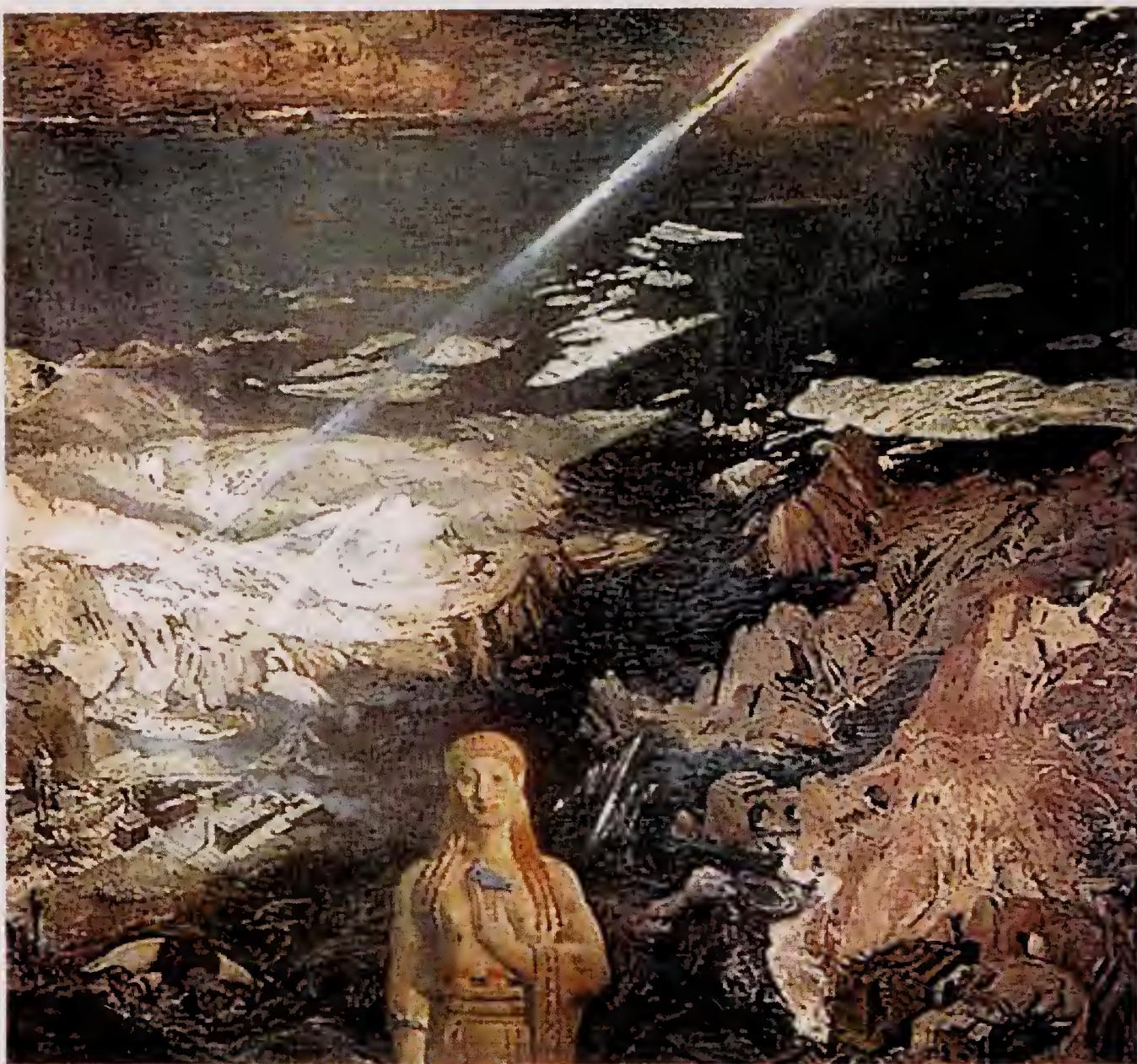


Figure 2 Lev Bakst, 'Terror antiquus' (1908)

constantly drawing and painting. He returned to St Petersburg with three albums, including sketches of the archaic female statues excavated by the Acropolis, the portal and columns of the palace at Knossos, the Lion Gates at Mycenae, and the pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia.¹⁴ Many of these details were subsequently incorporated into the landscape of 'Terror antiquus'. Bakst began work on the painting in early 1906, and completed it in the summer of 1908, a year after his visit to Greece.¹⁵ It is clear that he was consciously collecting ideas and sketches for his painting during the trip. In one of the albums, next to a drawing of an olive tree amidst sketches of the theatre at Epidaurus, he jotted down a revealing note: 'Olive trees in the wind – silver in outline (see Terror!)'.¹⁶

Bakst was quite secretive about his picture and would not let anyone see it while he was still working on it. When it was finished, he first took it to Paris where it was exhibited at the Salon d'Automne in 1908.¹⁷ 'Maintenant le secret est dévoilé', he announced excitedly in a letter to his friend, the composer and music critic Walter Nouvel (1871–1949), proudly reporting on the painting's 'huge and resounding success', reflected in the forty reviews that he had collected from French and English journals.¹⁸ The picture was then shown in St Petersburg at the Salon exhibition, organised by Sergei Makovskii (1877–1962) from 4 January to 8 March 1909, featuring over six hundred works by some forty artists.¹⁹ It made a huge impact, not just because



Figure 3 Karl Briullov, 'The Last Days of Pompeii' (1833)

of its enormous size (at 2.5 by 2.7 metres, it filled an entire wall),²⁰ but also because it confronted viewers with a disturbing riddle – a powerful image of catastrophe alongside an enigmatic smiling female. What exactly was the artist trying to represent?

The scene depicted is shown from a high vantage point, putting the viewer in a privileged position, looking down from above on the dramatic landscape below. A jagged bolt of lightning comes from the heavens, suggesting that this is the work of the gods. Beneath swirling clouds, the land masses divide, inundated by the sea, which is rapidly covering the mountains below, displayed like a map in relief. We can see small signs of human habitation and civilisation – on the right, fortress-like buildings, on the left, ships going under water, a temple, toy-sized idols on pillars, people scurrying about like ants – but all this seems very distant, too far away to matter.

In this respect Bakst's work can be contrasted with another well-known representation of an ancient civilisation destroyed by elemental catastrophe, 'The Last Days of Pompeii' (1833), painted some seventy years earlier by Karl Briullov (1799–1852) while living in Italy. In this work all the emphasis is on the human tragedy, which the spectator is invited to view from close up. The fiery red, orange, gold, and brown colours engage the emotions more than the cool aquamarine and silver-grey tones of 'Terror antiquus.'

Returning to Bakst's painting, the most obvious element of the riddle posed to the viewer lies in the female figure that confronts us in the foreground. Her pose is rigid and her gaze unflinching. She is curiously disembodied, we cannot see the lower part of her body – is she standing on a higher mountain closer to the viewer, or does she float in space in another dimension over this horrific picture of cosmic catastrophe? Her three long braided tresses and dress make her look like an archaic Greek woman or goddess. She holds a small blue bird, possibly a dove, to her breast. As a sacrificial offering? If

so, to whom or what? And why is she smiling, so unperturbed and detached, with her back to the scene of destruction below her. One thing is clear: she is looking at us, the viewers, and challenging us to make sense of her relation to the awesome scene behind her. Who can she be?

In terms of appearance, she closely resembles an archaic Greek statue of a *Koré* [maiden], in particular the *Peplos Koré* (ca 530 B.C.), first excavated from a pit on the Acropolis in 1886 and housed in the Acropolis museum of Athens. This marble statue shows a maiden about 1.20 metre tall, clad in a *chiton* over which is a *peplos*, a garment gathered at the waist and pinned at the shoulders, originally ornamented with painted decoration. Her left forearm, now missing, was originally extended and held an offering for the gods. In Bakst's painting the maiden's forearm is restored and clasped to her chest, holding a bird; similar poses are exhibited by other *Korai* holding birds, also found on the Acropolis.²¹ These statues were often dedicated at sanctuaries and could represent goddesses as well as attendants of the deity of the sanctuary. They could also serve as grave markers, which might be significant in the case of this painting of a scene of death and destruction.

As already mentioned, Bakst sketched figures of the *Korai* at the Acropolis museum.²² In a letter to his wife of 8 October 1908, he describes the female figure in his painting as a 'slavish copy of the famous statue found in Athens',²³ evidently referring to the *Peplos Koré*. However, identifying the prototype of the female figure does not solve the problem of exactly what she is supposed to represent in the painting. An attendant to a goddess? Or the goddess herself? If so, which one? Athena, patroness of Athens, goddess of wisdom and war, presiding over the arts, philosophy, and literature? Or Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty? Or Persephone, goddess of the underworld? Although contemporary and later critics have most commonly identified the female figure in Bakst's painting with Aphrodite,²⁴ there are no sources for this link in the writings of Bakst, nor is there any consensus in modern scholarship that the original *Peplos Koré* is related to Aphrodite.²⁵

No wonder, then, that this painting made such an impact when it was first shown. And no wonder that it provoked so many interpretations. Bakst himself left no clues. All we know is that in the last stages of his work on the painting he struggled to make it more terrifying. In July 1908 he told his wife that he had made several changes: 'the statue is becoming frightening and the background gloomier – I keep on trying to make the painting terrify me with its awesomeness [zhut'iu]; the water in the immediate foreground is not "bottomless" enough'.²⁶ He remained dissatisfied with his work, and did not feel that he had achieved what he had hoped to. In September he confessed to his wife: 'I no longer like my picture. What has turned out is not what I wanted to achieve. I hope in my next work I will manage to express fully that which I long to do. Maybe I have made a mistake with this painting, maybe I have grown tired of looking at it!',²⁷

Unfortunately, Bakst did not reveal exactly what he had hoped to achieve – perhaps he did not know himself. However, his silence conveniently left the field open for several contemporaries to wade in with their interpretations. This brings us to the fourth stage of the process of classical revival – the new life taken on by a work of art through



Figure 4 The Peplos Koré
(ca 530 B.C.)



Figure 5 The Lyons Koré
(ca 540 B.C.)

a range of critical readings. Bakst had created a powerful and arresting representation of a problem which obsessed his age: how to relate to the lost civilisation of antiquity, how to recover its legacy? How would his contemporaries react?

The first response came from Annenskii, who wrote to Bakst soon after the painting was exhibited, offering his own explanation of its significance. Unfortunately, his letter has not survived, but we can gauge something of its content from Bakst's reply of 5 February 1909:

Most respected Innokentii Fedorovich,
Your letter afforded me several minutes of pleasure and, speaking figuratively, extended the horizons of my imagination. You look at my painting very perceptively, and some of your parallels are a revelation for me, just as the inner meaning of symbols, which the artist often uses with his unconscious creative mind, can serve as a revelation.²⁸

The implication seems to be that Bakst had unconsciously created a symbolic image, the inner meaning of which had been revealed to him by Annenskii. Bakst went on to state his regret that Annenskii's words were only addressed to him, since the 'masses' were not yet ready to grasp the meaning of his painting.²⁹ From this much we can deduce that he did wish to convey a message through his painting to a wider audience, but preferred others to articulate it for him.

Bakst's wish was gratified, as Annenskii's letter was soon followed by a spate of public responses. Aleksandre Benois was the first serious art critic to discuss the

painting in detail; in his review of February 1909, one of a series of pieces on the ‘most significant exhibition of the season’ written for the newspaper *Speech [Rech’]*,³⁰ he devoted more space to ‘Terror antiquus’ than to any other work shown at the Salon. His comments on the painting were, however, profoundly ambivalent. On the one hand, he praised it as Bakst’s best achievement to date, commending the artist’s sense of ecstasy and terror before the living gods of antiquity, and his new, original vision of Hellas as a wilderness cursed by the gods. On the other hand, he also suggested that Bakst’s Jewish origins (‘his “blood” religion’), while endowing him with ‘the Semite’s divine awe’ and awareness of ‘deep mysteries’, prevented him from attaining a full understanding of the Hellenic worldview. Benois’s questioning of the artist’s potential grasp of his subject also coloured his assessment of the painting itself. Despite admiring its brilliant idea and the author’s intentions, he finds its execution disappointing, devoid of ‘inner life’ and ‘rousing vitality’, exuding ‘the cold of a clever agenda, but not the thrill of inspiration’. Bakst ‘intellectualises’ [*umnichaet*] but fails to inspire. His painting not only deserves to be kept in a museum under constant study, it also has ‘an exceptionally “museum-like” character’. Only in his earlier sketch did he find ‘the strength to express mystic terror’, his ‘rationality’ subsequently caused him to betray his original intuition.³¹ A year and a half later in July 1910 Benois delivered an even harsher verdict, citing ‘Terror antiquus’ as an example of the ‘far-fetched dissertations’ [*nadumannye dissertatsii*] that were typical of Bakst’s early work.³²

Although Benois clearly believed that his age needed to experience true ‘mystic terror’, he did not explain why, nor did he attempt to analyse the origins and nature of the concept of ‘Terror antiquus’. This lacuna was filled by Viacheslav Ivanov, who gave a well-attended public lecture on Bakst’s painting in St Petersburg in March 1909. As the only critical assessment delivered orally in front of a large audience, his response had a particularly strong impact, reinforced by its subsequent publication in the lavish journal *The Golden Fleece [Zolotoe runo]* and later inclusion in Benois’s review of the year’s artistic highlights.³³ Ivanov, who had studied classical antiquity under Theodore Mommsen and Otto Hirschfeld in Berlin, brought all the weight of his formidable erudition and mythopoetic imagination to bear upon Bakst’s work. He linked the catastrophic scene depicted in the painting to the passage in Plato’s *Timaeus* where Solon, one of the Seven Wise Men, recounts his conversation with an Egyptian priest about the time when ‘in a single dreadful day and night’ following ‘earthquakes and floods of extraordinary violence’ ‘the island of Atlantis was [...] swallowed up by the sea and vanished’.³⁴ As for the archaic maiden, Ivanov related her to a whole series of mythological figures, including Mnemosyne, the wise goddess of Memory and mother of the Muses, Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty, born from the sea and associated with the dove, a universal Moira or Fate, dominating the destiny of humanity, the World Soul (a concept propounded by Vladimir Solov’ev), and, finally, Mother-Earth.³⁵

Citing Tiutchev’s song about ‘ancient, native chaos’, Ivanov commented that although modern man can still hear the muffled murmurs of ‘ancient cataclysms of a still chaotic world’, he no longer believes what he hears. However, he added, it would only take two or three more ‘Messinas’ to upset the false complacency of the modern age and to revive a true sense of ‘ancient terror’ before the workings of fate. Bakst’s

work was completed before the devastating earthquake and tsunami that ravaged Messina on 28 December 1908, but exhibited a few weeks after this catastrophe. Ivanov evidently saw the painting as a timely reminder of the ancient chaos that underlies the universe and as a prophecy of its return. The memory of the lost culture of the past is clearly a necessary precondition for its recovery and survival in the future.

Ivanov then asks a surprising question: where is the Terror in 'Terror antiquus'?³⁶ This was precisely the element that Bakst felt was lacking in his painting and struggled to develop. Ivanov, however, took a positive approach to this perceived lack of terror. He saw the artist's 'exclusively aesthetic' relationship to his subject as the painting's greatest merit and as proof that his spirit was truly 'ancient', for he succeeded in conveying the 'cathartic refraction and mediation' of tragedy experienced at a distance, without emotional involvement, testifying to the truth of Dostoevsky's dictum that 'Beauty will save the world'.³⁷

The next response came from the poet, artist, and critic, Maksimilian Voloshin (1877–1932). In October 1909, in the opening issue of *Apollo*, founded by Sergei Makovskii, he published an essay, 'Archaism in Russian painting', devoted to the work of Nikolai Rerikh, Konstantin Bogaevskii, and Bakst. The same issue also included a mezzotint engraving of 'Terror antiquus' and a frontispiece designed by Bakst, showing an archaic figure of Apollo playing the *kithara* next to a group of satyrs cavorting behind pillars modelled on the columns of the palace at Knossos (a point noted by Voloshin in his essay).³⁸ Voloshin began by emphasising the importance of recent archaeological investigations on Crete: they had put flesh on past dreams and opened up a new imaginative space for visions of antiquity to flourish in. As he put it: 'The whole earth has become like a cemetery, in which the dead are already moving in their graves, ready to rise again'.³⁹

Voloshin had been present at Ivanov's lecture and had no doubt read the published version as well.⁴⁰ He followed Ivanov in identifying the scene of catastrophe with the destruction of Atlantis, and also noted the 'profound lack of danger in the events taking place', the distance that separates the viewer from the scene 'as if we are looking through the thick mirrored glass of an underground aquarium'.⁴¹ Like Benois and Ivanov he associated the archaic female figure with Aphrodite, but added a surprising comment about the 'similarity between her face and Bakst's own face', arguing that the artist's face shows through her face just as naturally as Dürer's face shows through his depictions of Jesus Christ.⁴² Although we know that Bakst used his wife's hand as a model from which to recreate the statue's missing hand,⁴³ the suggestion that he modelled its face on his own features seems positively bizarre. Voloshin's intention in putting forward this comparison, however, is of greater interest than any debate about its possible validity. He evidently wished to suggest a link between Aphrodite, who holds a sacrificial dove, and the figure of the modern artist, represented by Bakst, who serves the goddess of beauty by offering up the sacrifice of his own art.

The importance ascribed to Bakst's painting was not just limited to Symbolist circles. Nikolai Gumilev (1886–1921), an Acmeist poet of the next generation, ended his review of Makovskii's exhibition with a discussion of Bakst's 'enormous canvas', assigned to a category on its own. He approved its 'grandiose idea', noting that

‘antiquity is understood not like the pink fairytale of a golden age, but as the crimson glow of world fires’. However, like Benois, he felt that the artist had failed to cope with his task and had produced only the schematic outline of a symbol, interesting, but inadequate to the strength of the original idea. Nevertheless, he concluded that ‘for our time it is particularly important to find our own approach to antiquity, and Bakst’s painting is a reminder of this’.⁴⁴

‘Terror antiquus’, born out of a potent combination of shared cultural atmosphere and personal experience, generated multiple responses, and in turn inspired further works of art. Three years after it was exhibited in St Petersburg, Andrei Bely (1880–1934) completed the first version of *Petersburg*, arguably the most important Russian modernist novel of the twentieth century. Drawing an analogy between the northern capital and the account of Atlantis given in Ivanov’s reading of Bakst’s painting, he portrayed the revolution of 1905 as a clash between the Apollonian order of the city and the Dionysian forces of chaos that threatened to engulf it.⁴⁵ Thus, Bakst’s painting, in Ivanov’s interpretation, generated a new myth of St Petersburg as a threatened Atlantis – a myth that endures to this day.

Classical antiquity in the Soviet age

At the time of the revolution of 1917, the idea of the imminent Slavonic renaissance of Greek antiquity was still being actively championed by Zelinskii and his followers. A group of Greek scholars, philosophers, and poets calling itself the ‘Union of the Third Renaissance’ met regularly at Zelinskii’s flat in St Petersburg right up until the October revolution.⁴⁶ Nikolai Bakhtin (1896–1950), the classicist and former student of Zelinskii (who also taught his younger brother, the well-known literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin) described ‘the evening when Ivanov read [...] his translation of the *Oresteia*’ to the group as ‘the most intense and decisive experience’ of his life.⁴⁷

What happened to this projected renaissance after 1917? Was the legacy of the Silver Age passion for classical antiquity lost or preserved for posterity? This difficult question gives rise to several paradoxical and contradictory answers. On the one hand, the new Bolshevik regime certainly wished to underline its break with the past. It regarded an interest in classical antiquity as regressive and suspect, and preferred to align itself with avant-garde Futurist-style art. One of the Bolsheviks’ first moves in 1921 was therefore to close down all university departments of classical philology, a crude attempt to arrest cultural memory by wiping out the study of Latin and Greek.⁴⁸

On the other hand, much early Soviet art was a direct extension of pre-revolutionary ideas. The Bolshevik cult of new forms of collective art was nothing other than a superficially ‘Sovietised’ version of the old Symbolist ideal of *vserodnoe* [universal] art, based on a revival of Greek myth and tragedy. In 1919 Ivanov was asked to collaborate with the theatrical section of Narkompros; he was the main speaker at a conference on the organisation of the people’s creative talents in the sphere of drama, and his lectures on Aeschylus were more popular than ever before. As recently demonstrated, his ideas reached an even wider audience when they were assimilated

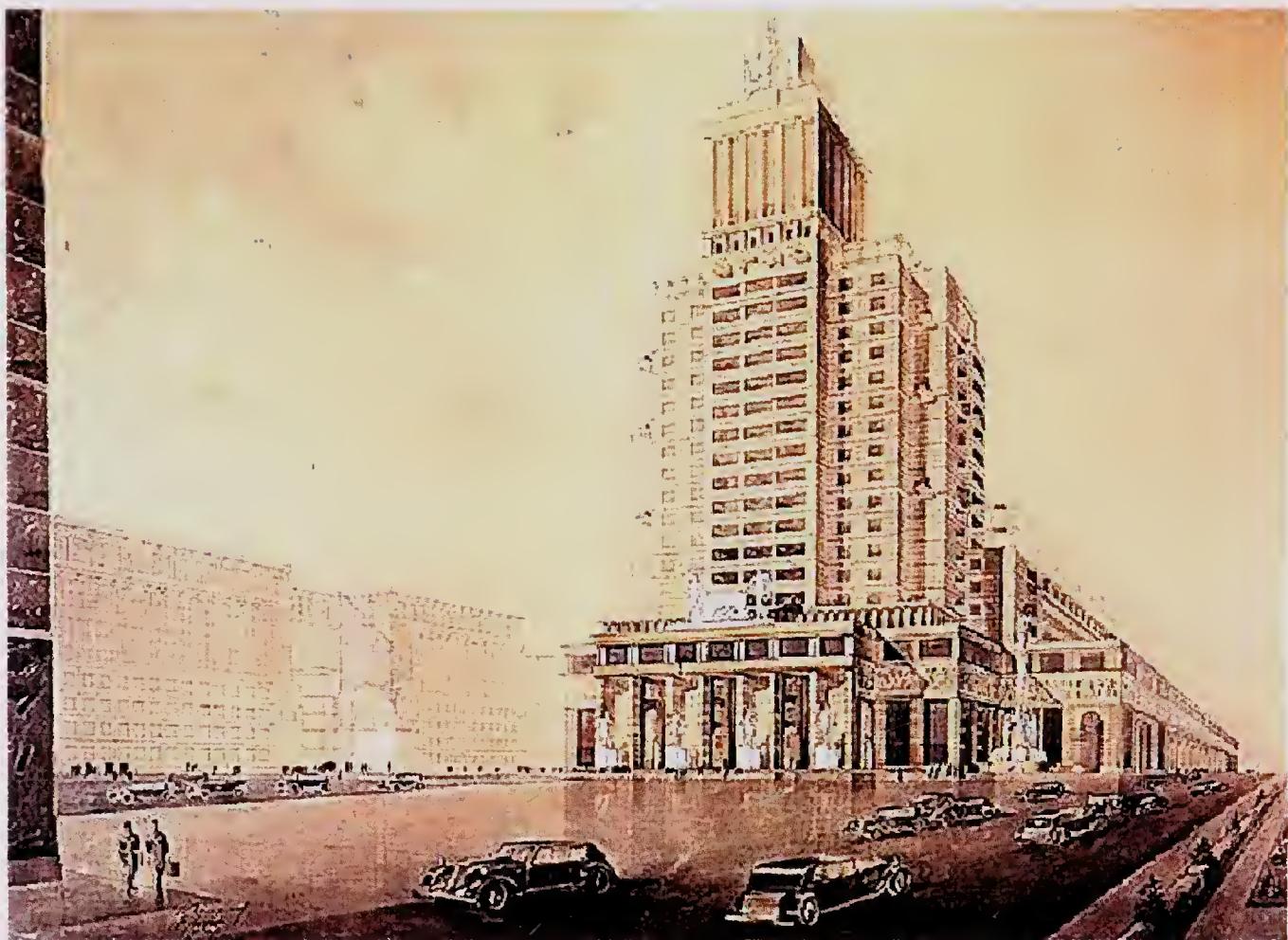


Figure 6 The House of Books project (1934)

into the aesthetics of Soviet cinema in the 1930s through the agency of Adrian Piotrovskii, the illegitimate son of Zelinskii.⁴⁹

So, here we have a clear paradox: an official party-line, pursued on an institutional level, aimed at the abolition of the study of classical antiquity, but contradicted by the very art forms, rooted in the Silver Age cult of classical antiquity, which the Bolshevik regime embraced for its own propaganda purposes. In this confusing new world the cult of Hellenism espoused by Osip Mandel'shtam (1891–1938) acquired a different resonance. In his essay 'On the Nature of the Word' (1922) he lamented: 'We have no Acropolis. Our culture is still wandering about and cannot find its own walls'.⁵⁰ Invoking the teachings of Ivanov and Annenskii, he insisted on the need for the Russian poetic word to be rooted in classical antiquity.

As the state consolidated its power, it became more confident of its ability to integrate the past into its cultural agenda and set about creating its own 'Soviet-style' Acropolis. By the 1930s attitudes to the classical heritage began to change. New translations of the classics were commissioned and published in luxury editions. The regime's wish to be identified with images of imperial greatness led to a renaissance of neo-classical architecture. The project of 1934 for a new House of Books is typical of the rather monstrous designs of the period that tried to ape the grandeur of classical tradition. Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1940) drew some rather uncomfortable parallels between Soviet Moscow and Roman imperial power during his work on *The Master and Margarita* in the 1930s.

Towards the end of his life Stalin even ordered the reintroduction of Latin into the school curriculum, took steps to increase the number of Latin teachers, and revived the traditional secondary schools specialising in the classics. Although this might seem to

be quite a positive move, there was a much darker side to the state's attempt to control the study of the classics.⁵¹ In her diary and letters to her cousin Boris Pasternak, Ol'ga Freidenberg (1890–1955), a classicist at Leningrad State University, describes the stifling ideological pressure and intrigues that poisoned academic life during the late 1940s. She tried to take refuge in her work on ancient Greek metaphor and the origins of Greek lyric poetry. However, after Zhdanov's campaign of August 1946, any interest in Western culture was identified with anti-Russian cosmopolitanism, and the situation further deteriorated. In 1948 she had to attend a compulsory gathering at the University, where academics were invited to 'discuss' the persecution of their colleagues; at a similar meeting convened at the Academy of Sciences on the previous day, nobody even paid any attention when the Pushkin scholar Boris Tomashevskii fainted, followed by the folklorist Mark Azadovskii, who had to be carried out of the auditorium.⁵²

Freidenberg was relatively lucky: she was at least able to stay in Leningrad and to continue working throughout the Stalinist period. Not everyone was so fortunate. Aleksei Losev (1893–1988) managed to complete his degree in classics and philosophy at Moscow University just before the revolution, soon after consulting Ivanov about his dissertation on Aeschylus in 1915. He had already written eight books by 1930 when he was arrested for restoring cuts made by the censor to *The Dialectics of Myth* (1930).⁵³ Prison and exile followed, lasting until 1933. For a total of twenty-three years he was unable to publish any work. One might think that this would spell intellectual and spiritual death. And yet, astonishingly, he was able to maintain his creative spirit and Christian faith throughout these long and difficult years (in 1929 he had taken a vow of secret monasticism).⁵⁴ Although he was already sixty when Stalin died, he lived on until the ripe old age of ninety-five and was therefore able to mould the new generation of classicists, who, by a happy irony of cultural history, had come into being as a result of Stalin's enforced reintroduction of the classics.

Losev's most brilliant pupil, Sergei Averintsev (1937–2004), born at the height of the purges in 1937, was twenty-four when he graduated from the classics department of Moscow State University in 1961, and thirty when he defended his dissertation on Plutarch and classical biography in 1967. A photograph taken in 1964 in front of the old building of Moscow University shows him as a rather gawky graduate student, clutching his hat and briefcase, standing next to Tania Vasil'eva, later well-known for her work on the philosophy of Plato; the elderly men sitting on the bench are the classicists Sergei Radtsig (1882–1968) and Aleksandr Popov (1881–1972), both born in the early 1880s.⁵⁵ This picture serves as a useful visual reminder of the living link – crucial to the transmission of the legacy of classical antiquity – between the pre-revolutionary generation and the Soviet period of the thaw. Averintsev saw himself as Losev's spiritual disciple, and was held in high esteem by his mentor.⁵⁶ Through Losev he had a direct connection to the culture and mind-set of the past. For this reason, no doubt, one of his obituaries described him as 'the last person from the Silver Age'.⁵⁷

Mikhail Gasparov (1935–2005), born two years before Averintsev, graduated from the same department in 1957. In his unusual, eclectic book, *Notes and Extracts* (2000), he describes his initial encounter with Averintsev. He was already in his final year when the shy first-year student approached him with a highly obscure question related to



Figure 7 Sergei Radtsig, Aleksandr Popov [seated]
Tania Vasileva, Sergei Averintsev [standing] (1964)

Pythagoras. Although Gasparov could not answer the enquiry, he was happy that their first meeting was sanctioned by the authority of Pythagoras. A few days later Averintsev asked him to translate a line from the *Aeneid*. On this occasion Gasparov was able to respond, and modestly comments that this was probably the first and last time he ever managed to help his friend.⁵⁸

The two students promised to write each other's obituaries⁵⁹ (in the event, Gasparov wrote an obituary for Averintsev in the year before his own death).⁶⁰ They worked together for many years in the classical antiquity section of the Institute of World Literature in Moscow (IMLI), first headed by Gasparov, then by Averintsev. Gasparov kept a record of various pithy and astute comments made by Averintsev over the years, comparing his role in this respect to that of Seneca paraphrasing Cicero.⁶¹

Averintsev's celebrated Saturday lectures at the historical department of Moscow University in the early 1970s were an extraordinary cultural phenomenon, attended by crowds of people of all ages and backgrounds – scientific as well as humanities. He was a truly unique personality: without being an open dissident, he nevertheless managed to speak and write publicly within the system about such 'anti-Soviet' themes as religious faith, and to do this in a completely fresh 'unSoviet' voice.⁶² When I first went to meet him in his Moscow flat in the late 1970s, he greeted me in a melodious flow of ancient Greek (I was quite overwhelmed and too embarrassed to reveal that I could not understand him). In one of his last talks, delivered in Italy in 2003, he spoke about his personal impressions of the old Petersburg intelligentsia in Soviet times; his heartfelt eulogy of the 'real priests of learning, who seemed like people of another species, the last citizens of a submerged Atlantis', driven by the 'determination to observe rigorously

the laws of this Atlantis until the end of their days in spite of everything' could equally well be applied to Averintsev himself.⁶³ He not only translated the *Timaeus*, he also made the message of Plato's account of Atlantis come alive for his generation. As Ol'ga Sedakova emphasised in her obituary, his writings are unique, not just because they convey knowledge, but because 'they convey something more important – they help [people] not to die while still alive, they help [people] not to give in to the "spirit of the times"'.⁶⁴

In *Notes and Extracts* Gasparov explains that he decided to study classical antiquity in the 1950s because he regarded it as 'a crevice in which to hide away from contemporary life'.⁶⁵ The study of Russian literature was an ideological minefield, while the classics offered a more distant, less controlled intellectual space. Antiquity became a type of academic 'safe house' for serious intellectuals in post-Stalinist times, an area where they could develop their philological skills, translate ancient texts, engage with philosophical thought, and transmit this legacy in untainted form to a new generation. Significantly, both Gasparov and Averintsev subsequently moved on to write about Russian literature as well – Gasparov's work on versification and Averintsev's essays on Ivanov and Mandel'shtam stand out for their brilliance among a sea of mediocre Soviet literary criticism. It is a remarkable example of historical justice that the Silver Age – which had formed the Soviet generation's approach to classical antiquity – was in turn preserved and rediscovered by the very generation that had taken refuge under the protective wings of the classics. This is surely a powerful proof of the memory of one cultural epoch leading to the survival of another.

Classical antiquity in the post-Soviet age

The post-Soviet period is the least clearly defined and most difficult one to assess. First of all, it has not been going for very long (less than twenty years). Secondly, post-Soviet Russian culture is still in a state of transitional flux, far from being a homogeneous unit with its own identity. Uncertainty about the present and future is only partially offset by nostalgia for the past – nostalgia for the lost culture of the Silver Age, and even nostalgia for the certainties of Soviet life, two 'Atlantises' that have disappeared under a sea of popular culture, often imported from the West. As in any period of anxiety and redefinition, the question of Russia's relation to classical antiquity resurfaces. With the end of another Russian empire, the legacy of previous empires is once more invoked.

Last year I witnessed a puzzling example of the reception of classical antiquity in post-Soviet Russia. The writer Liudmila Petrushevskaya (1938–), famous for her unvarnished portrayals of the darker side of Russian life, came to London to celebrate her seventieth birthday and presented a 'cabaret show' at the British Library. Wearing one of her magnificent hats, she declaimed rap-style poems, read her nonsense fairytale, sang Edith Piaf's 'La vie en rose', and showed three animated films that she made recently in what she calls her 'studio of manual labour', i.e. on her home computer. These short silent films consist of jerky little black line drawings in cartoon style, accompanied by minimal handwritten text. Petrushevskaya describes them as 'more underground than the underground'.⁶⁶ In a five-minute film of 2005, a Lenin look-alike

harangues a crowd from the tribune and is taken for Lenin's double. In another film, made in 2007, Tolstoi and Chekhov pose for a photograph and argue vigorously over Tolstoi's wife's pince-nez, which Tolstoi tries to give to Chekhov.⁶⁷ These eccentric vignettes were followed by an eight-minute film, *Ulysses: they went and they came* [*Uliss: ekhali-priekhali*, 2007] – highly recommended for students trying to master Russian verbs of movement. The narrative opens with the hero of the *Odyssey* sailing across the seas on his way back to Ithaca after a twenty-year absence. On his return, he slaughters the 120 suitors who were queuing up to win his wife's attentions, but – and here comes the crunch – a rather stony-faced Penelope expresses little interest in his return.

In an interview conducted on her birthday last May Petrushevskaia spoke about her fondness in old age for rereading familiar stories from her schooldays: Lenin organising the revolution in exile, the relations of Tolstoi and Chekhov, and the return of Ulysses.⁶⁸ In her cinematic reworking of these three sacred tales from the spheres of Russian history, literature, and Greek myth, the plots are inverted and the heroes are denied access to meaningful language. *Ulysses* is reduced to a caricatural figure whose homecoming goes unnoticed even by his own wife. What are we to make of this? Pure nonsense? Absurdist parody? Or a deeper meaning? What kind of post-Soviet, post-modernist statement is Petrushevskaia making? Although she refers to 'Ulysses' as a 'funny film', she also admits that it can hardly be called optimistic.⁶⁹ Following decades of absence, the prototypical hero finally returns home; after committing several acts of violence, he finds that no one is waiting for him anymore. Could this be an allegory of the legacy of a heroic past, trying to find a place in a cultural 'home' that no longer exists in post-Soviet Russia?

Perhaps indeed the 'old stories' of classical antiquity no longer hold any meaning, beyond evoking a vague nostalgia for the past. Perhaps ancient Greece – formerly the object of study, dreams, travel, and creative work – has been reduced to little more than a commercial commodity. The nouveaux riches of Russia can now buy villas on Greek islands; the less wealthy can afford to visit as tourists. Crete is currently one of the most popular destinations for residents of St Petersburg – if Bakst were still alive today, he could purchase a one-week tour to the island for as little as 22,000 roubles or 500 euros. Russians who prefer to stay at home are invited to do up their residences in Greek style. Websites with titles like *Svoyremont* offer free advice on how to go about this; one interior designer warns that you will need quite a lot of space – if you want to turn your dwelling into an ancient temple or Knossos palace, forty square metres will simply not suffice!⁷⁰ Other sites display alluring images of elegant pillared halls, classical salons, and Grecian master bedrooms.⁷¹

These external signs of an interest in classical antiquity may be very visible in today's Russia, but do not go very deep. What about the level of engagement with classical studies in education? In schools, the situation has definitely improved. The teaching of classical languages has been revived, a number of old-style classical *gimnazii* and *lycées* have opened in Moscow and St Petersburg. In universities and academic institutions, however, matters have got somewhat worse. Academic salaries in Russia dropped dramatically after the collapse of the Soviet Union, leading to the departure of



Figure 8 Aza Takho-Godi (2007)

many scholars for posts abroad (Averintsev, for example, took up a chair at the University of Vienna in the last years of his life).

For a valuable insight into the current state of classical studies in Russia, we shall turn to an interview with a remarkable veteran of the subject. Aza Takho-Godi (1922–) was Head of the Department of Classical Philology at Moscow University for thirty-four years and taught generations of classicists. As a student of Losev's and then as his second wife, she was in direct touch with the Silver Age approach to classical antiquity. It is a fitting tribute to her role as a bridge-builder between different eras and cultures that her eighty-fifth birthday in 2007 was marked with a conference on the links between classical antiquity and Russian culture of the Silver Age, resulting in a fine book published last year.⁷² Interviewed in 2007 for the journal *The Elite of Society* [*Elita obshchestva*], she emphasised the underlying unity of East and West that could be found in the world of classical antiquity and potentially recovered through serious study (in this connection it is interesting to note that Bakst also saw Greece as part of the East and often introduced Oriental elements into his Greek designs). She lamented the current 'exceptional decline' of culture in Russia, noting that schools in the 1930s and 1940s, even in the 1950s, were far better. Although books on classical antiquity are still being produced, some dilettante authors have entered the field. When asked to name the top classicists in Russia, she complained about the fragmented nature of contemporary scholarship – no one could match the level and breadth of Zelinskii. Only Losev succeeded in combining the study of philosophy, philology, aesthetics, and mythology, because he still had 'zakvaska prezhniaia', the 'culture of the past' – in both senses of the term.⁷³

As a testimony to this legacy, Aza Takho-Godi succeeded in establishing and securing state-funding for a unique institution in the heart of Moscow on the Arbat. The House of A. F. Losev [*Dom A. F. Loseva*] is a wonderful haven of cultural activity, with



Figure 9 The House of A. F. Losev (2007)

a constant programme of lectures and conferences and a well-stocked library, open to the general public as well as to specialists. When my study of the correspondence on humanism between Ivanov and the Oxford classicist Bowra was published a few years ago, I was extremely touched to be invited there to give a presentation of my book to the general public; the size of the audience and the liveliness of their interest in the subject were most impressive.⁷⁴

Recalling Stalin's enforced introduction of Latin, Aza Takho-Godi did not support the idea of a state-sponsored programme to boost classical languages in the school curriculum. She also resisted being drawn on the links between the ancient world and Christianity, finding no common ground between paganism and Christian faith. Her reticence on these two subjects is perhaps linked to a controversial aspect of the current revival of the classics in schools. In 2001 Nikolai Grintser (1966-), a classicist and graduate of Moscow University, published an article in *The New Literary Review* [*Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*] about the contemporary state of classics in Russia. While welcoming the unexpected boom in the teaching of Latin and Greek in secondary schools, he expressed serious reservations about the attempts of the Russian Orthodox church to control this activity, promoted as a means of 'reviving "the salt of the Russian Land"'. He identified a danger in the attempted subjugation of classical studies to the Russian Orthodox idea and a nationalist agenda. In this connection he drew attention to the shameful role played by classical philology in the ideological system of Nazi Germany.⁷⁵

Grintser's observations confirm the survival in post-Soviet Russia of the ingrained tendency to adopt a religious approach to classical antiquity, often associated with the

ideal of national revival. This trend, already noted at the beginning of this lecture in relation to the early twentieth-century projected Slavonic renaissance, is also reflected in the comments of another classicist and graduate of Moscow University, currently professor at his *Alma Mater* and at St Tikhon's Orthodox University. In the early 1990s Iurii Shichalin (1950-) founded 'Museum Graeco-Latinum' [*Greko-latinskii kabinet*], an institution promoting the teaching of the classics and publication of related textbooks and academic works, and set up a new *gimnaziia* specialising in the classics. Interviewed in November 2008 about the state of classical education in Russia, he explains that he only managed to survive the 'era of hopeless and crass Brezhnevite well-being' through his study of the classics and regular meetings with Losev, for whom he worked as personal secretary from 1974 to 1981. He makes it clear that his fervent desire to promote his subject in contemporary Russia is linked to his faith in the future rebirth of his country: 'I never lost faith in Russia, and I believed that I should at least in some measure contribute towards her resurrection, which, in my view, is quite impossible without an education in the classics'. Whilst the Soviet period was still able to draw on the cultural, scientific and spiritual resources of the pre-revolutionary era, the present post-Soviet climate poses quite different challenges: combating the inertia of the Soviet period and resisting the blandishments of the 'previously inaccessible material well-being of the Western world'. According to Shichalin, these two forces threaten to undermine the serious task of reconstructing the intellectual and spiritual foundations of Russia.⁷⁶ More than a hint of nationalism can be sensed in this invocation of the traditional opposition between Western 'materialism' and the task of resurrecting Russia's 'spiritual' identity, to be recovered through the study of the classics.

A similar approach can be detected in the world of book-publishing. Ivanov's complex scholarly work on the religion of Dionysus, published in Baku in 1923, was republished in St Petersburg in 1994 with an astonishing print-run of 8,000 copies, and, even more surprisingly, reprinted yet again in 2000. One cannot help wondering just who are all these Russian readers, whose appetite for Ivanov's ideas on Dionysus has to be sated by repeat editions of such an obscure work. The answer to this question must surely be that Ivanov's study has gained an audience beyond academic circles because of its perceived relevance to Russia's future, based on a correct grasp of the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity. Such a conjecture is supported by the preface to the 1994 edition; the anonymous editor extols Ivanov's understanding of the cult of Dionysus as a precursor of Christianity and his view of ancient tragedy as an early intuition of the idea of the universal church or mystic body of Christ, uniting all followers through mystery, and sums up the book as an 'outstanding theological work on proto-ecclesiology'.⁷⁷

We can see from these examples that the characteristic tendency to view classical antiquity as a key source contributing towards the goal of Russia's spiritual rebirth survived from the Silver Age and resurfaced intact during the post-Soviet period. We may well wonder, therefore, whether anything has changed over the last century. Are present-day attitudes simply a recycled version of pre-revolutionary ideas, presented in a somewhat simplified form to a modern audience?



Figure 10 Three Petersburg schoolgirls and the 'kind smile' (2004)

For a partial answer to this question, we shall return to our opening example of Bakst's 'Terror antiquus' and investigate what this painting means today for visitors to the Russian Museum in St Petersburg. Is it understood in the same way as it was a hundred years ago, when it was first exhibited in the same city? The threatened civilisation depicted on the canvas can now be seen to stand for a whole series of lost Atlantises: classical antiquity, the Silver Age, Soviet culture with its idols on pillars, even 'true' Russian culture – all washed away by the sea of time. How do Russians understand the message of this painting today? We shall consider two responses, both reflecting different degrees of anxiety about the status of culture in contemporary Russia.

In February 2009, Irina Borisovna Kirikova, a resident of St Petersburg, wrote to Dmitrii Medvedev (1965–) to express her indignation over various new exhibits in the Russian Museum. She was particularly upset by a work entitled 'Fountain', showing a life-size model of a man in vest and trousers, holding a gun in one hand and relieving himself over the corpse of a dead man at his feet. She opens her letter by appealing to the President as a fellow citizen who, like her, grew up in Leningrad,⁷⁸ visited the Russian Museum in his youth, and often had occasion to view Bakst's 'Ancient Terror'. They both understood the message conveyed by the smiling female figure in this painting to be as follows: whatever destructive acts might be committed in history, art will always remain an eternal, transcendent value. In the name of this ideal, she begs Medvedev to prevent the display of unsuitable exhibits, which are out of keeping with the museum's reputation and will only serve to induce 'Russophobia' among visitors. She regrets that he has inherited only the 'ruins' of Russian culture and entreats him to safeguard the morals of the nation, without which there can be no talk of the 'renaissance of Russia'. In other words, she is using Bakst's painting to engage the President's support in rescuing 'true art' from the decaying civilisation of post-Soviet Russia.⁷⁹

The second response is taken from an on-line 'Internet book' about the visual arts, created by the Russian Museum with the support of an American project on Internet

education. The website is designed by and for young people at school or university with an interest in art. It includes a page on Bakst's 'Terror antiquus', put together in 2004 by three 'ordinary girls' from the 42nd *gimnaziia* of St Petersburg. Vita, Dar'ia, and Iaroslava pose rather woodenly next to the archaic female figure, looking like modern incarnations of the three Fates. In their thoughts about the painting, posted on the site, the girls ponder the significance of the archaic goddess's smile and come to the optimistic conclusion that it is a 'kind smile', for the goddess 'is happy to think that culture and civilisation will be reborn again in an even more perfect form'.⁸⁰ Thus they find in Bakst's painting an encouraging message of hope for the survival of Russian culture, based on memory of the past.

At the beginning of this lecture I mentioned that I hoped to show that the reception of classical antiquity in Russia has been marked by, and is even the source of some surprising continuities. We have seen how classical antiquity served as a constant point of reference throughout the twentieth century; how the religious approach to antiquity set in motion in the Silver Age persisted even in the Soviet period and has recently resurfaced; how in a century of threat to the survival of culture, the memory of classical antiquity has acted as a connecting thread, enabling the Silver Age renaissance of classical antiquity to survive through the decades of Soviet power and to carry its message through to the present.

The final point I would like to stress is the crucial role of individuals in this process. None of these 'continuities' would have been possible without people like Zelinskii, Ivanov, Losev, Averintsev, Gasparov, Takho-Godi and many others, who form a living chain of dedicated individuals, through whom cultural memory is transmitted in a way that guarantees the survival of culture. The widespread public displays of mourning and commemoration following the recent deaths of Averintsev and Gasparov reflect this awareness,⁸¹ and should inspire all of us to a greater appreciation of the vital role that we too can play in transmitting the cultural legacy of the past to the students of the present.

Notes

- 1 For an interesting account of the development of classical studies in Russia through to the twentieth century, see E. D. Frolov, *Russkaia nauka ob antichnosti: istoriograficheskie ocherki*, St Petersburg, 1999; second revised edition, 2006.
- 2 Ivan Kireevskii, 'On the Nature of European Culture and Its Relation to the Culture of Russia' (1852), in Marc Raeff (ed.), *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology*, with an introduction by Isaiah Berlin, New York, 1978, p. 182.
- 3 See, for example, Viacheslav Ivanov's series of essays, 'Ellinskaia religiia stradaiushchego boga' and 'Religiia Dionisa', published in *Novyi put'* and *Voprosy zhizni* in 1904 and 1905, and his book, *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, Baku, 1923. For a recent study of the Rome-based discourse of Russian national identity, see Judith E. Kalb, *Russia's Rome: Imperial Visions, Messianic Dreams, 1890–1940*, Madison, Wisconsin, 2008.
- 4 Zelinskii quotes from his essay of 1899 in F. F. Zelinskii, 'Viacheslav Ivanov', in S. A. Vengerov (ed.), *Russkaia literatura XX veka (1890–1910)*, Moscow, 1916, III, viii, p. 102.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 103, 113.
- 6 F. Zelinskii, 'Innokentii Fedorovich Annenskii kak filolog-klassik', *Apollon*, no. 4, January 1910, pp. 8–9.

7 Iu. Beliaev, 'Ippolit', *Novoe vremia*, 16 October 1902, cited in I. N. Pruzhan, *Lev Samoilovich Bakst*, Moscow, 1975, p. 63.

8 Bakst, Letter to L. P. Gritsenko of 12 March 1903, cited in Pruzhan, *Bakst*, p. 64.

9 André Levinson, *Bakst. The Story of the Artist's Life*, London, 1923, p. 102.

10 Bakst, Letter to L. P. Bakst of 10 May 1907, cited in Pruzhan, *Bakst*, p. 110.

11 L. Bakst, *Serov i ia v Gretsii: Dorozhnye zapisi*, Berlin, 1923, p. 26.

12 Ibid., p. 19.

13 Benois makes this comment as a prelude to his analysis of 'Terror antiquus' in 'Eshche o "Salone"', in Aleksandr Nikolaevich Benua, *Khudozhestvennye pis'ma. 1908–1917. Gazeta "Rech"*. Peterburg: Tom 1: 1908–1910, ed. by Iu. N. Podkopaeva and others, St Petersburg, 2006, p. 86.

14 I have examined two albums related to Greece, held in the Department of Drawings of the State Russian Museum in St Petersburg, and am grateful to the Director of the Museum, V. A. Gusev, for granting me permission. The first album (R54372-R54446 II/I b/49), marked 'L. Bakst. Athènes. Hôtel Grande Bretagne', includes sketches of landscapes and coastal views, drawings of the portal of the palace of Minos at Knossos, and details from the frescoes at the palace; on the last page Bakst has noted that his sketches of statues are to be found in a different album. The second album (R54489-R54548 13/I b/51), marked 'Corfou. Hôtel d'Angleterre. M. L. Bakst', includes drawings of ruins at Corinth, Mycenae, Epidaurus, Delphi, Olympia, and brief notes on the main periods of Greek history and art. The third album of sketches from the trip to Greece, held in New York at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, evidently contains Bakst's drawings of Greek statues.

15 Pruzhan refers to a drawing by Bakst entitled 'Terror antiquus', shown in early 1905 at an exhibition of the Union of Russian artists, but gives no source for this information; Pruzhan, *Bakst*, p. 114. I have not been able to trace any further reference to a drawing of 1905. In his 1909 review of 'Terror antiquus' Benois describes a sketch for the painting, but does not give any date or location for it; Benua, *Khudozhestvennye pis'ma. 1908–1917*, p. 88. The sketch described by Benois may be related to the drawing mentioned by Bakst in his letters to Benois of May 1906. He refers to work in progress on 'Terror antiquus' in his letter to A. N. Benua of 18 May [1906] (mistakenly dated 18 May [1905] in the archival folder), and comments in another letter to A. N. Benua (received on 18/5 May 1906) that he would not allow the publisher R. R. Golike to reproduce his drawing of 'Terror antiquus' because he was preparing a 'large work on a variation of this theme' (Gosudarstvennyi Russkii muzei, Otdel rukopisei, f. 137, ed. khr. 671, l. 12, l. 26). I am grateful to Nina Shabalina, the Director of the Department of Manuscripts, for her kind assistance in enabling me to consult Bakst's letters in the State Russian Museum. I would also like to thank Professor John E. Bowlt (University of Southern California) and Elena Terkel (Tret'iakov Gallery, Department of Manuscripts) for sharing with me information related to their current work on a new three-volume edition of Bakst's correspondence; in the course of research they have not come across any specific references to earlier versions of 'Terror antiquus' before July 1908.

16 The note appears in the second album (R54489-R54548 13/I b/51).

17 In October 1908 he wrote in French to the poet and artist Maksimilian Voloshin, asking whether Voloshin could arrange for his new work to be exhibited in Paris. See the entry for 17 (30) October 1908, in V. P. Kupchenko, *Trudy i dni Maksimiliana Voloshina: Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva. 1877–1916*, St Petersburg, 2002, p. 211.

18 Letter to V. F. Nuvel (undated), cited in Pruzhan, *Bakst*, p. 118 (note 1).

19 For the dates of the exhibition, see Benua, *Khudozhestvennye pis'ma. 1908–1917*, p. 70. For a description of its organisation and contents, see Sergei Makovskii, 'Nikolai Gumilev', in Sergei Makovskii, *Na Parnase "Serebrianogo veka"*, Munich, 1962, p. 195.

20 Ibid. Makovskii singles out Vrubel's late studies and Bakst's 'Terror antiquus' as the works that made the biggest impression at the exhibition.

21 The upper part of the Lyons *Koré*, discovered in 1810 in Marseille and housed in Lyons, was later matched up with its lower half, located in the Acropolis museum of Athens. See G. M. A. Richter, *Korai. Archaic Greek Maidens: A Study of the Development of the Kore Type in Greek Sculpture*, London, 1968, pp. 57–58.

22 Pruzhan, *Bakst*, p. 110. In his account of his travels in Greece, Bakst also recalls Serov comparing a beautiful Greek peasant girl sighted near Delphi to a cross between an antelope and the 'archaic "maiden" from the Acropolis museum'. Bakst, *Serov i ia v Gretsii*, p. 55.

23 Pruzhan, *Bakst*, p. 115.

24 Aleskandr Benois, Viacheslav Ivanov, and Maksimilian Voloshin all link the archaic female figure with Aphrodite. This opinion is also echoed by later critics, e.g. Pruzhan, *Bakst*, p. 115. Aleksis Rannit suggests that she is 'an archaic sculpture of the goddess Aphrodite, painted after an Athenian koré in the Acropolis museum'. Aleksis Rannit, 'Vyacheslav Ivanov's Reflective Comprehension of Art: The Poet and Thinker as Critic of Somov, Bakst, and āiurlonis', in Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (eds), *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher*, New Haven, 1986, p. 265. None of these critics give any explanation for their association of the *Koré* with Aphrodite.

25 In the early twentieth century, *Korai* were generally thought to represent the actual deity; this would explain why most contemporary critics of Bakst's painting identified the archaic maiden with a goddess, but it does not clarify why they linked her with Aphrodite rather than Athena. Later scholars challenged the earlier identification with the deity; Richter states that it is not known whether the *Koré* represented the deity to whom the statue was dedicated, or the dedicant, or neither; Richter, *Korai. Archaic Greek Maidens*, p. 3. More recently, Keesling argued against Richter that the Peplos *Koré* is a 'kore / Artemis hybrid', representing Artemis (originally holding a metal rod in her right hand and perhaps a bow in her extended left hand) rather than Athena – in which case 'the Peplos Kore could be a rare Archaic example of [...] a "visiting god," a representation of one god [Artemis] dedicated in the sanctuary of another [Athena]'; Catherine M. Keesling, *The Votive Statues of the Athenian Acropolis*, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 98, 135, 138–39. For further discussion of this controversial topic, see Mary Stieber, *The Poetics of Appearance in the Attic Korai*, Austin, 2004.

26 Letter to L. P. Bakst of 27 July 1908, cited in Pruzhan, *Bakst*, p. 117.

27 Letter to L. P. Bakst of September 1908, cited in Pruzhan, *Bakst*, p. 117.

28 Letter to I. F. Annenskii of 5 February 1909 (RGALI), cited in Pruzhan, *Bakst*, p. 117 (note 2).

29 From a longer version of the same letter, cited in O. Iu. Ivanova, 'Viach. Ivanov i I. Annenskii: dve tochki zreniia na kartinu L. Baksta "Terror antiquus" (versiia)', http://annensky.lib.ru/notes/ivanova_o.htm, accessed 4.05.2009.

30 See Benois's first review of the exhibition, 'Po povodu "Salona"', *Rech'*, 7 (20) January 1909, no. 6, in Benua, *Khudozhestvennye pis'ma. 1908–1917*, p. 66.

31 'Eshche o "Salone"', *Rech'*, 11 (24) February 1909, no. 40, in Benua, *Khudozhestvennye pis'ma. 1908–1917*, pp. 86–91.

32 'Russkie spektakli v Parizhe. "Shekherazada"', *Rech'*, 12 (25) July 1910, no. 186, in Benua, *Khudozhestvennye pis'ma. 1908–1917*, p. 456.

33 "Drevnii uzhas": Po povodu kartiny L. Baksta "Terror Antiquus" (Publichnaia lektsiia)', *Zolotoe runo*, 1909, no. 4, pp. 51–65, republished in Ivanov's influential collection of essays, *Po zvezdam: Stat'i i aforizmy*, St Petersburg, 1909, pp. 393–424. Ivanov's essay was later

translated into German in the 1930s and reached a new audience in Europe between the wars: ‘Terror Antiquus’, Übersetzt von Nicolai von Bubnoff, *Corona*, Fünftes Jahr [V], Zweites Heft [2], Januar 1935, pp. 133–64. In his retrospective chronicle of the main artistic events of 1909, Benois noted that Bakst’s painting had provoked the greatest amount of discussion and mentioned Ivanov’s lecture ‘of a purely literary and historico-philosophical character’; ‘[Khudozhestvennaia zhizn’]’, *Rech*, 1 (14) January 1910, no. 1, in Benua, *Khudozhestvennye pis’ma. 1908–1917*, pp. 312, 315.

34 Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, translated with an introduction and an appendix on *Atlantis* by H. D. P. Lee, Harmondsworth, 1971, p. 38.

35 References to ‘Drevnii uzhas’ are taken from the text published in Viacheslav Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by D. V. Ivanov and O. Deshart, Brussels, 1979, vol. 3, pp. 92, 98, 104, 107.

36 Ibid., p. 97.

37 Ibid., p. 98.

38 Maksimilian Voloshin, ‘Arkhaizm v russkoi zhivopisi (Rerikh, Bogaevskii i Bakst)’, *Apollon*, no. 1, October 1909, pp. 43–53. The reproduction of ‘Terror antiquus’ appears in the same issue on p. 15.

39 References to ‘Arkhaizm v russkoi zhivopisi’ are taken from the text published in Maksimilian Voloshin, *Liki tvorchestva*, ed. by V. A. Manuilov, V. P. Kupchenko, A. V. Lavrov, Leningrad, 1988, pp. 274–81 (p. 276).

40 See the entry for 16 March 1909 in Kupchenko, *Trudy i dni*, p. 219.

41 Voloshin, *Liki tvorchestva*, p. 278.

42 Ibid.

43 In a letter to his wife L. P. Bakst of August 1908 Bakst wrote ‘I will need to draw from your hand the bones of the long fingers for the statue in the painting’; Pruzhan, *Bakst*, p. 115 (note 2).

44 Nikolai Gumilev, ‘Po povodu “salona” Makovskogo’, first published in *Zhurnal Teatra literaturno-khudozhestvennogo obshchestva*, 1909, no. 6, p. 17, cited from N. S. Gumilev, *Pis’ma o russkoi poezii*, Moscow, 1990, p. 265.

45 Carol Anschuetz, ‘Ivanov and Bely’s *Petersburg*’, in Robert Louis Jackson and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (eds), *Vyacheslav Ivanov: Poet, Critic and Philosopher*, New Haven, 1986, pp. 210–11. In 1905, the year in which *Peterburg* is set, Bakst drew Bely’s portrait.

46 Nicholas Bachtin, ‘The Symbolist Movement in Russia’, in Nicholas Bachtin, *Lectures and Essays*, Birmingham, 1963, p. 43.

47 Ibid., p. 41.

48 See A. F. Losev, *Strast’ k dialektike: Literaturnye razmyshleniya filosofa*, Moscow, 1990, pp. 21–22, cited in A. A. Takho-Godi, E. A. Takho-Godi, V. P. Troitskii, *A. F. Losev – Filosof i pisatel’: K 110-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia*, Moscow, 2003, p. 37.

49 Robert Bird, ‘Russkii simvolizm i razvitiie kino-estetiki: Nasledie Viach. Ivanova u A. Bakshi i Adr. Piotrovskogo’, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 2, 2006, pp. 67–98.

50 Osip Mandel’shtam, ‘O prirode slova’, in Osip Mandel’shtam, *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh: Tom vtoroi. Proza*, introduction by B. A. Filippov, second revised edition, New York, 1971, vol. 2, p. 251.

51 In a recent interview the classicist Aza Takho-Godi dates this change of policy back to the late 1940s. Aza Takho-Godi, ‘Antichnost’: Edinenie, kotorogo seichas ne sushchestvuet’, *Elita obschestva*, no. 11 (37), November 2007, http://www.esj.ru/journal_archive/2007/nojabr_2007/aza_taho_godi_antichnost_edinenie/, accessed 4.05.2009. Mikhail Gasparov notes that students were being driven into studying classics at Moscow State University in 1952. Mikhail Gasparov, *Zapisi i vypiski*, Moscow, 2000, pp. 309–10.

52 See the extract from Freidenberg's diary in Boris Pasternak, *Perepiska s Ol'goi Freidenberg*, pod redaktsiei i s kommentariami Elliotta Mossmana, New York, 1981, p. 268.

53 Originally published as *Dialektika mifa*, Moscow, 1930. For an English translation, see Aleksei Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, translated by Vladimir Marchenko, London, 2003.

54 For a brief account of Losev's biography see Elena Takho-Godi, *A. F. Losev. Ot pisem k proze. Ot Pushkina do Pasternaka*, Moscow, 1999, pp. 7–15. Further details can be found in Elena Takho-Godi, “‘Intellektual’nyi roman” Alekseia Loseva’, in A. A. Takho-Godi, E. A. Takho-Godi, V. P. Troitskii, *A. F. Losev – Filosof i pisatel'*: K 110-letiu so dnia rozhdeniia, Moscow, 2003, pp. 3–204 (pp. 23, 37, 103) and in Aza Takho-Godi, *Losev, Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei*, second revised and expanded edition, Moscow, 2007.

55 Sergei Radtsig, a specialist in Greek literature, graduated from Moscow University in 1904. Aleksandr Popov was the author of several textbook grammars of Latin and Greek.

56 Mikhail Gasparov, ‘Pamiati Sergeia Averintseva’, in R. A. Gal'tseva (ed.), *In Memoriam: Sergei Averintsev*, Moscow, 2004, p. 145.

57 Grigorii Pomerants, ‘Poslednii iz Serebrianogo veka’, first published in *Moskovskie novosti*, 27 February – 4 March 2004, reprinted in Gal'tseva (ed.), *In memoriam: Sergei Averintsev*, pp. 88–89.

58 Gasparov, *Zapisi i vypiski*, p. 164.

59 Ibid.

60 Gasparov, ‘Pamiati Sergeia Averintseva’, first published in *Novyi mir*, 2004, no. 6, reprinted in Gal'tseva (ed.), *In Memoriam: Sergei Averintsev*, pp. 142–46.

61 See the section ‘Iz razgovorov S. S. Averintseva’, in Gasparov, *Zapisi i vypiski*, pp. 164–70.

62 See the description of the lectures in the obituary by Irina Rodnianskaia, ‘Oglasitel' pokoleniia’, in Gal'tseva (ed.), *In Memoriam: Sergei Averintsev*, pp. 42–43.

63 S. S. Averintsev, ‘Opyt peterburgskoi intelligentsii v sovetskie gody – po lichnym vpechatleniiam’, in Gal'tseva (ed.), *In Memoriam: Sergei Averintsev*, p. 194.

64 Ol'ga Sedakova, ‘On pomogal ne sdavat'sia “dukhu vremeni”’, in Gal'tseva (ed.), *In Memoriam: Sergei Averintsev*, p. 61.

65 See the section ‘Antichnost’, in Gasparov, *Zapisi i vypiski*, pp. 309–14 (p. 314). The same point is also made on p. 309.

66 ‘Mul'tfil'my Liudmily Petrushevskoi’, *Stengazeta*, 16.04.2008, <http://www.stengazeta.net/news.html?news=4737>, accessed 30.04.2009.

67 *Besedy K. Ivanova* (2005), *Pensne* (2007).

68 See the interview conducted by Anzhelika Zaozerskaia: Liudmila Petrushevskaya, ‘Zhivot akhineikami i starinnymi shliapkami’, *Trud*, no. 093, 26.05.2008, <http://www.trud.ru/issue/article.php?id=200805260931801>, accessed 30.04.2009.

69 Ibid.

70 Iana Tais, ‘Zapiski dizainera: sozdaem antichnyi inter'er’, *Sobstvennik: Zhurnal o liudiakh i domakh*, <http://sob.ru/issue2113.html>, accessed 5.05.2009.

71 See, for example, <http://www.vnutri.com/styles>, and <http://www.svoymont.ru>, accessed 5.05.2009.

72 E. A. Takho-Godi (ed.), *Antichnost' i russkaia kul'tura serebrianogo veka: K 85-letiu A. A. Takho-Godi*, XII Losevskie chteniia, Moscow, 2008. This book is only a small part of a larger collection, due to be published by Nauka.

73 Aza Takho-Godi, ‘Antichnost’: Edinenie, kotorogo seichas ne sushchestvuet’, *Elita obschestva*, no. 11 (37), November 2007, http://www.esj.ru/journal_archive/2007/nojabr_2007/aza_tako_godi_antichnost_edinenie/, accessed 4.05.2009. When Losev's House was threatened with closure a few years ago, Viacheslav Ivanov's son, Dimitrii Ivanov, then still alive in Rome, mobilised public opinion and raised funds to keep it open.

74 Pamela Davidson, *Vyacheslav Ivanov and C.M. Bowra: A Correspondence from Two Corners on Humanism*, Birmingham Slavonic Monographs, no.36, Birmingham, 2006. Other participants in the presentation of this book included Avril Pyman, Gennadii Obatnin, and Konstantin Lappo-Danilevskii. For an account of the presentation, see P. V. Dmitriev, “‘Poet – Myslitel’ – Uchenyi”. IX Mezhdunarodnaia Ivanovskaia konferentsiia. K 140-letiui Viach. Ivanova. Moskva. 18–23 dekabria 2006 g.’, *Biulleten’ Biblioteki istorii russkoi filosofii i kul’tury ‘Dom A.F. Loseva’*, vypusk 5, 2007, p. 39.

75 N. P. Grintser, ‘Chto emu Gekuba: Klassika v sovremenном okruzhenii’, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2001, no. 50, pp. 334–35. See also Zara M. Torlone, ‘Quae supersunt. Classical Philology in Russia: Past, Present, and Future’, *The Classical Bulletin*, 2002, vol. 78.2, pp. 195–206.

76 F. N. Savel’eva, ‘Razgovor o klassicheskem obrazovanii v Rossii: Interv’iu s direktorom Greko-latinskogo kabineta, uchreditel’ “Klassicheskoi gimnazii pri Greko-latinskem kabinete”’ (21.11.2008), <http://www.portal-slovo.ru/pedagogy/> 39991.php?PRINT=Y, accessed 14.07.2009. ‘Slovo’ is a Russian Orthodox educational website.

77 ‘Ot redaktsii’, in Viacheslav Ivanov, *Dionis i pradionisiistvo*, St Petersburg, 1994, pp. 7–8.

78 Medvedev, born in Leningrad, graduated from the Faculty of Law of Leningrad State University in 1987, completed his graduate studies in 1990, and taught law at the University during the 1990s until his move to Moscow.

79 Irina Kirikova, ‘Russofobiia v russkom muzee’, Russkie novosti, Informatsionnoe agentstvo, http://ru-news.ru/art_desc.php?aid=2573, accessed 17.05.2009.

80 Violetta Cherkasova, Dar’ia Kiriliuk, Iaroslava Kostitsyna, ‘Ulybka arkhaiki: O kartine Baksta “Drevnii uzhas”’, http://center.rusmuseum.ru/InetBookNew/ Smile_Arkhaica03.htm, accessed 17.05.2009.

81 See, for example, the institution of ‘Gasparovskie chteniia’, an annual conference to honour the memory of Gasparov, established in 2006 at RGGU.

